**Introduction**

This paper reports part of a larger study of students in educational change. Educational change is a complex phenomenon which is continuous in schools (Leithwood & Cousins, 1993). The term may be used to refer to any of the processes that alter the behaviours, attitudes, roles and responsibilities of those who are involved in education, or alter the structures, procedures or outputs of an educational organization – such as a class, school, school district or an entire educational system (Fallan, 1998; Hargreaves, 1994; Leithwood, 1993; Leithwood, & Cousins, 1993). Hargreaves, Airsnew and West (1994, p. 21) identified two main forms of educational change: **incremental change** or the "gradual, often subtle transition from one state to another", or **planned change** which "seeks to interrupt the natural development of events, to break with previous practices to establish a new order". Further, they note that educational change may originate from external factors: "what others would do to us", to our "schools", or normal factors which they describe in terms of "natural" or "organic" growth. In this study, the emphasis is on **planned educational change**, originating from the external pressures of system level policy initiatives.

Much educational change is about redefining roles involving shifting in power and responsibilities, between the different actors involved (Priedman, 1997), and there are many actors involved in educational change, including school administrators, teachers, parents, the community and students. Yet, arguably, it is those in the policy elite who exert the most influence, using their power, privilege and status in order to sustain and propagate particular versions of schooling (Smyth & Shakedown, 1998), leaving students "inexorably turned into a culture of silence" (Freire, 1970). Fullan (2001) has argued that students are usually excluded from both the processes and decision making associated with change and that instead of being empowered by the changes, students become the "objects" of change and find themselves lost in the changing environment. However, the power of the silent majority can be used to subvert change (Bove, Ball, & Gold, 1992) and some studies indicate that students may be the most powerful, especially when it comes to precipitating the Matauranga (Corbett & Wilson, 1995; Friedman, 1997; Thwaites & Hargreaves, 1993).

Nieto (1991) has pointed to the deficit of research that includes the student as participants. This paper aims to make a contribution to foregrounding the roles and responses of students in educational change. Specifically, it focuses on educational change associated with "restructuring" policy involving school closures, amalgamations and the creation of middle schools and senior colleges. The paper reports a single case study conducted in 2001 and 2002 from a larger project on student perceptions of educational change in the State of Western Australia (WA) in schools under the authority of the Department of Education (1).

**Background context**

Educational change in Australia in recent decades reflects many of the trends evident in other developed countries, especially the United Kingdom (UK), the United States of America (USA), New Zealand (NZ) and Canada. One of the meta discourses used to justify continuous waves of educational restructuring over the last few decades in such countries has been empowerment to local school communities through devolution of decision making from central authorities to individual school sites (Kersten, 2000). Critics, however, have argued that it may be more of a shifting responsibility for education from the state to local education producers and consumers in an increasingly marketised climate (Apple, 2001; Whitty, 2002). For example, the UK – which historically has provided many models for educational change in Australia – witnessed top-down devolution initiatives from the 1980s through the Local Management of Schools (LMS) policy. This restructuring, it was argued, would increase...
local level accountability, whilst the state sought greater centralised control over schools through the introduction of the National Curriculum and OFSTED (Office of Standards in Education) inspections. In conjunction with open enrolment, restrained in the discourse of parent choice, parents were encouraged to choose schools for their children on the basis of school performance (Phillips, 2001), ensuring that 'failing' schools would close (Ball, 1994). Watney et al (Watney, Power, & Hall, 1995, p. 43) have asserted that devolution through LMS can be seen as 'the simple abdication of responsibility by the state' and a mechanism for 'shifting the blame' for educational 'failures' from central authorities to schools.

The mantra accompanying policies of devolution and marketisation in many countries, became 'school effectivenes's' with a focus on efficiency, string leadership, high expectations for students, clear goals, and frequent quantifiable monitoring (Pultan, 1991; Townsend, 1994), including standards which can be set and measured. The result has been that blame for inadequacies in the school system have been placed on schools, teachers, poor educational leaders and poor choices by families (Rae & Weerak, 1998). Thus, policies of devolution to local schools and market competition between schools has been increasingly 'politically correct' for governments (Morley & Bassoli, 1999) which have then used performance measures as a basis for the allocation of education funding (Rae & Weerak, 1998), thereby exacerbating educational inequalities, and further disempowering the educationally disadvantaged. These policy trends have been common across different countries, giving rise to much interest and research on the globalization of education policies and practices (Smith & Slackland, 1998; Taylor, Rinv, Lingard, & Henry, 1997). However, we would argue that there is a need to avoid glossing over context-specific differences with 'globalisation talk', and one step in this direction is to conduct research which considers, in detail, 'the local' within 'the global'. This emphasis leads into the focus of this paper on educational change associated with restructuring, specifically based on the perceptions of students, in one particular case study school in one state of Australia.

In the State of Western Australia, in the 1990s, a significant starting point in the push towards school-based management occurred with the Better Schools Report (Ministry of Education, 1987). However, after initial moves towards devolution, there was a hiatus, and very little real change took place (Arigo, 1998). In the late 1990's the Western Australian Government released its 'Plan for Government School Education' to set the direction for the government education system into the twenty-first century (Education Department of Western Australia, 1997). This plan represented a policy assembly aimed at restructuring education framed in the rhetoric of improving outcomes for all students. The Plan included the Local Area Education Planning Framework (hereafter referred to as the LSEP Framework) with an emphasis on recognizing the delivery of education by changing the focus of planning from the system level, to an individual school level, to a group of schools within an education district, purportedly to better manage the delivery of curriculum and resources (Education Department of Western Australia, 1997). The LSEP Framework was couched in the discourse of social justice and the provision of a quality education for all students (Education Department of Western Australia, 1997). Yet at the same time resources were to be used efficiently and effectively, and the aim of any specific strategies chosen by particular areas must be to "maximise the use of facilities and any spare facilities should be sold and funds used to provide area and state improvements." (Education Department of Western Australia, 1997). Staff, parents, secondary students and the wider community were to be consulted on plans for their area - the LSEP Framework was to be "customer driven process" (Education Department of Western Australia, 1997, 5). Restructuring options to be considered in the consultation process in each district included school amalgamations, school closures, and the creation of senior colleges and middle schools.

The case study presented here is that of the LSEP Framework policy enactment within one group of schools in one district to create a single school from the amalgamation and closure of three others. The primary focus is on the students involved in this educational change.

Research methodology

Critical theory provided the overarching conceptual framework for the study. Specifically, the study was based on exploring the exclusion of students as participants in the change process. A central concern was to examine how these students experienced their role in educational change as expressed in their voices. To fully understand students' roles in educational change, it is important to understand their subordinate social status and to explore students' own assumptions regarding this role (Kimchee & McLaren, 1994). There is a culture of domination, an inherited social hierarchy that is observed in schools, where the students form the lowest rung. The impact of the status of students on their experiences of change was explored in this study (Cromby, 1998). By giving voice to the students it allowed, and perhaps encouraged, them to think critically beyond the "parachute of current experience" (LeCompe, 1993, p. 89) and to reflect on their responses and roles in the change process.

The research questions which guided the study were:

- What are students' perceptions of educational change as it is happening to them in the case school study?
- Do students believe that the changes have made any difference to their school experiences and outcomes?
- To what extent do students believe they have influenced the process of educational change in this school?
- In whose interests do students perceive changes to the school were made?

The exploratory and in-depth understandings sought in the research used a qualitative case study method. The case study method was chosen because of its flexibility and because it allows information to be collected from many sources (Punch, 1998). Yin (1993). Focus group interviews with students were the predominant form of data collection and these were conducted over two years (2001 and 2002). Other data collection methods for this study included semi-structured individual interviews with a number of the staff involved in the LSEP Framework implementation, and the analysis of documents on the LSEP Framework and its implementation from both the system level and the individual case study school.

The larger study from which this paper is drawn used multiple case studies of schools which had created middle schools and senior college as a result of the school amalgamations and student characteristies of the LSEP process. A mixture of purposive and self-selection sampling was used to choose the student respondents in each case study school. In the particular case study reported in this paper the Year 10 group was invited to participate in the study because these students had been asked to accept more of the educational and structural changes that took place than other student cohorts in the new school. Students were invited to be a part of the research process by letter, and those students who responded were then placed into focus groups. Three focus groups, which ranged in size from four to eight students were conducted in 2001, the first year of operation of the new school. The first group was all female, one group all male, and the other three groups mixed. One individual interview was conducted because the student did not want to be interviewed as part of a group, an option given at the outset. Follow-up interviews were conducted the next year, however, these will not be reported in this paper.

Focus groups were conducted in a music room, attached to the arts centre of the school, away from the main office area. The room was bright and airy, with a view over the yard. The students sat around a table as a group with the interviewer. It was hoped that this would encourage students to become "conversational partners" (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p. 11). Interviews were taped using multiple microphones of different colours. Discussion of the taping equipment, especially the coloured microphones, often helped to break the ice and relax the students.

The research setting: Lighthouse School

The findings of student perceptions of educational change in one case study school, Lighthouse School (pseudonym), are presented in the next section below. However, as individual case study schools are nestled within their own unique localized settings, they should not be studied in isolation from appropriate contextualisation, and therefore the setting of Lighthouse School is briefly outlined here.
Towards the end of 1997 it was evident that competition between schools was strong. The Department of Education and the District Office staff initiated the implementation of the mandated LATP Framework. It was decided that a "committee to manage" the implementation process would be established and included representatives from District Office, staff from all the schools in the district, the Parents and Citizens Associations in the district, the WA State School Teachers' Union and several students. A member of the Lighthouse School's central office conducted the meetings, where it was announced that the status quo would not remain unchallenged.

In line with the LATP Framework, the district had to come up with alternative suggestions for the provision of education for students in the district, which would include school closures and amalgamations and the possibility of middle schools. As the process went on, it was a matter of debate over what shape the restructuring would take, whether it would be increasingly headed. All schools in the area had strong community ties and many ran special programs to bring in students from outside of their catchment area, in line with earlier divergence policy initiatives and moves towards marketisation, accommodating competition between schools. Thus, these school communities were expected to collaborate on an emotive issue such as school closure under a wider augmenting climate of localised inter-school competition. Unsurprisingly, the consultative process was not a smooth one.

Towards the end of 1997 it became apparent that despite local area planning the Education Department had already taken the decision to close both of the larger schools, downgrade the third school and build a new school on land previously purchased by the Education Department in an area where property values were much less expensive than for any of the three schools involved in the closures. This strategy would offer efficiency based on both savings through economies of scale and the sale of the valuable real estate on which the old schools were located, which was made in the local and State media that the new school would be built at a cost of $2 million — considerable to be a significant sum for a government school. The new school began to be referred to as a "Super School", referring to both its larger size and its more prominent "educational excellence" in the government sector, in competition with the high concentration of private schools in the area. Staff for the new school were appointed on a formal merit-based selection process from across the State. In many ways Lighthouse School was to be the "elite" of the government sector.

Lighthouse School, which would arrive to be a centre for excellence in all learning areas — of education at the beginning of the new millennium, "Cambrian, 2001" opened in 2001 with a middle school for years 8 and 9 on the same campus but separate from a senior school for years 10 to 12. The total student population was about 1200 and staff numbered approximately 126. The school took place in this context during the first two years of operation of the new school when students' perceptions of the changes they were experiencing were sought.

It is pertinent to note briefly at this point that staff at Lighthouse School who were involved in the local area planning committee strongly believed that the decision about closures, amalgamation and separation of middle school and senior school was made by the Department of Education before the consultation process even began. They reported that the planning committee was genuinely concerned to optimize the outcomes for all students and that, for example, they believed better subject selections would result from the restructuring. That is, they were operating within a social justice paradigm, however, in the end they realized that the decision was an economic one, made by others. These staff variously viewed the local area planning process as a "sham" and "tokenism" (staff interviews, 2001). However, in this paper, rather than reporting on the consensual experience of the intention in the report of the study findings below, the intention in the report of the study findings below is to report the perceptions of students. Extensive quotes are used in the presentation of the data to give students direct and unadulterated voice.

The case study findings at Lighthouse School

Responses from the focus group interviews revealed that students were very involved with the changes in their school, their expectations were thoughtfully and insightful. There were a number of interesting comments made by the students on all aspects of the changes, however, due to the nature of the paper, only these issues most frequently discussed by students will be highlighted here. Students had an occasion discuss issues with parents, older siblings and friends. The findings, for the purposes of this paper, are organised in relation to the research questions. Themes were drawn from the focus group interviews conducted in 2001 when Lighthouse School opened.

- What are students' perceptions of educational change in a school like this? Students had an occasion discuss issues with parents, older siblings and friends. The findings, for the purposes of this paper, are organised in relation to the research questions. Themes were drawn from the focus group interviews conducted in 2001 when Lighthouse School opened.

A number of the students in the Year 10 cohort at the new Lighthouse School first became aware that changes were on the way in late 1998, while they were in Year 7, almost three years before the closures of their old school. Others did not find out until the end of Year 8. Those who found out in year 7, were told because they were enrolled as part of the Academic Talent Program (ATP) at one school, which was to be closed and moved to another school involved in the amalgamation in preparation for transfer to the new campus. Those who found out in year 8 found out through a newsletter that were being sent from parents, or from other siblings. One student said he "found out through a friend and one student did not find out until the end of the year before his school closed. Other than those involved in the ATP program, none of the other students can remember being told officially, or directly by staff at the schools they were then attending, that their school was to be closed.

Most students were very quick to perceive that Lighthouse School was to be a new school, in culture as well as in name and place, although some students felt that the changes were in name only. One of the students who believed it to be the same, made the comment that: "Apart from the facilities, people are the same, the teachers are almost the same. I just feel it's just the same apart from the facilities and that's about all!" However this student was in the minority, most reflected the views of this student: "Yeah well, it's a whole new school". As one student put it: "Brand new school. It's like the day you went to a school. Like say you moved schools, but a few people you knew went with you, or you knew a few people. That's what it's like. It's like a new school experience, not this anymore" and another student indicated: "It's a new school. It's like a whole new feel. Everything's different, bigger in some aspects of the new school, which was 8 and 9 on the same campus, but separate from a senior school for years 10 to 12. The total student population was about 1200 and staff numbered approximately 126. The school took place in this context during the first two years of operation of the new school when students' perceptions of the changes they were experiencing were sought.

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Each of the focus groups was very aware of the temporary nature of the disruption. They anticipated an end to the changes at some point in the future, whether one year or ten years down the track. As one student succinctly put it, "I think that this will be a better school within the next five to ten years. They would have moved out all the teaching and teaching methods and teachers."

Students were very aware of the effect the changes had on their learning, with the majority believing that the changes had been detrimental to their learning. Several students noted a dramatic drop in grades: "Like okay I got straight A's last year and now this year I'm like C, straight Cs. And that's a big change," "I think I'm having a D now. I went from an A to a D," "I'm in the top maths class and it's divided. We have people who, okay get good grades last year but then this year they're just struggling." Some students blamed the over crowded classrooms, "we have like thirty-five people in our class and it's just too much." Others students commented that they had had so many as four teachers for one subject since the beginning of the year, reflecting the high turnover rate of staff at the new school. Other students just gave into the stress created by changes, as indicated by comments: "You just give up," and "It's just too disruptive like, you've been shuffled here, so quickly, everything's changed, and we haven't had time to settle in. New rules and stuff like that and people just don't want to be there." However, students who came over from the downsized school generally believed that both the quality of teaching and teachers was better at the new school, as exemplified in the comment: "I think it's just the way they teach. Like, they teach different things over here and over here's more, like it's more professional, you're restricted, can't mess around or anything." A few students from both schools which changed also felt that their learning had improved as a result of the changes. "My maths has improved since last year!" and "Yeah Mr. R is a good teacher." Others felt that the changes were much more ambivalent about the effects the changes had on their learning, with comments such as "Some classes yes and some classes no" and "it hasn't changed like the way I'm going to go into school and do my stuff!" Students were also very recuperative about the differences the new school was making in their schooling experiences. Students noticed changes in teachers' attitudes, teaching style in line with the new school rules and general changes in the expectations placed on them. A dramatic change in the atmosphere of the classrooms where teachers were more relaxed, students were more engaged, and there was less care, 'it's like they don't care a lot' and 'I don't think they try to get you.' Other students indicated that it was only fair that they were given more independence to "Let's just get used to it!"

In general, students believed that they were being encouraged to study more and aim for university with comments such as, "We're being encouraged to go for six [future-oriented subjects]." Although students still believed that it was those who were excellent in the ATP who were given the most encouragement and the better teachers, as several students explained: "Because I'm in ATP [they] give us better teachers. They know more and so, more has been concentrated on me. So I've got bigger workloads and I'm used to that!" "Once you realise that, there was the ATP and then the rest of the people, but what the ATP did in their class time was much different to what everyone else did!" and "How are the people who aren't in ATP going to improve if they don't have the facilities that the ATP have? Most students believed that there were a lot more resources and the better students who were interested and trying had been encouraged to leave or go to Technical and Further Education (TAFE), as reflected in the comments such as, "They've been talking about apprenticeships and TAFE", "talking about how easy it can be to do TAFE if you want to leave school now." Students believed that the school's focus should be helping the students settle into their new surroundings, as this student commented, "they need to concentrate on making us happy while we're here, so we will go through to Year Twelve." Most students were very cognizant of the lack of 'character' of the new school, especially in comparison with their previous schooling experiences. Comments included, "My school in another city was a shit hole. But it was a nice shit hole, you know, it was, there was just something about it, that, that would miss you, I know. I don't know, but here everything is so sterile I think, it's almost like a hospital!" "It doesn't have personality." Yeah, like all the families went through it [the old school] and everything but [Lithgow School] is now and no one does it before," and "Yeah, here it's so young." Students believed this made a difference to their school experiences, leading them to a form of passive resister, when the year began. "Well that's what I mean. People at the start of the year kind of rebellied a bit. You know like, it's just like, oh yeah, I came to this school. But now I have like the realised here and yeah we have to actually be here and, so another student found "But there's nothing to make you want to improve." Here too the students showed their awareness that this feeling of nonconformity and lack of 'character' would be temporary with comments such as "It's going to get settling," "The more the students vandalise it, the more it'll feel like home." "If the schools are a bit older you'd say 'oh that happened at one point and it was really funny because this happened and the school did this and we had throwing eggs here and stuff.'" it will have like a history."

To what extent do students believe they have influenced the process of educational change in the school?

The students did not believe that they had any significant influence over the process of change in their school. Students all spoke about the one or two people who were aware of having been involved in the changes, these were "Year Twelve basically" and a student councillor, who, as one student put it, "they're just the ones at the meetings I think, I'm not really sure what he did there." The rest students remembered being a part of the direct core, the name of the school (of a pre-selected group of four) and the school emblem, which they found unimportant, as indicated in the comment, "we were just getting letters inégos, something small like that," "significant." Some students spoke of becoming disillusioned, offering positive resistance to the changes, because of their lack of input. As one student commented, "They said 'we all gave them a fair chance to put their view', but they never even asked, really asked us if we the students wanted to do anything. They asked the community and their parents, but not the students. And so like most of the students didn't care enough." Most students believed that being left out of the process was as, one student said, "unfair." Another student added, "it was part of our school. I felt that it was going to be and we should put to have a say in it, rather than just the teachers just making the decisions and the head of the school." Most students believed that being left out of the process was as, one student said, "unfair." Another student added, "it was part of our school. I felt that it was going to be and we should put to have a say in it, rather than just the teachers just making the decisions and the head of the school." Most students believed that being left out of the process was as, one student said, "unfair." Another student added, "it was part of our school. I felt that it was going to be and we should put to have a say in it, rather than just the teachers just making the decisions and the head of the school." Most students believed that being
students and 'we're just come out with the school'. These students felt very much the primary sector was one student commented, 'It's the school we're made.' As one student, himself from a private school, said, 'The school was not that much different to private schools. A lot of people from my old school come here, it is too expensive to be a private school. There's not that much difference, so it's sort of throwing away your money for a little bit of difference'.

The students in the focus groups had a very heightened perception of the role money played in the building of Lighthouse School. They knew a lot of money had been spent on the school, some believed it was wasted, as is reflected in the following remark. "I think they spent too much money on trying to make it look good instead of making the school work well". Other students commented that Lighthouse School "looks cheap. My dad was looking through it and he was going 'I looks a really cheap school'. And I'm going 'yeah' and 'like' costume jewelry".

All the students in the study were aware that their old schools were run down and that it would cost a lot of money to replace and repair. However, students also realised the dual purpose, both of saving money by not making the repairs, and in making money by selling the land of the old schools. This is indicated in the following remark, "It was getting to the stage where in [the old school] did probably need repairs and I think instead of doing it up, they just built a new school and the land is worth a lot, so [the Department of Education] is going to make a profit out of that!". But many students would have in the words of one of the students, "never really been asked that question before", believed that the schools were eluded in order to sell the land, the perception being that the land the school was worth more if it was sold for housing. Overall, those students were very cynical about the closure of their old schools and the building of Lighthouse School. As one student remarked, "We got like a note from like the, from the minister or something saying how good it will be and we'll have a really good school because everything will be new and everything. But I'm, yeah you're just after the money, and commercialising I would say, just money, money, money."

It is important to consider the presentation of findings from Lighthouse School by emphasizing that this data from students was collected in the first year of the new Lighthouse School. Student perceptions of educational change are likely to evolve over time – hence the value of longitudinal case studies.

Concluding discussion

The following discussion focuses on meta-level themes to emerge from the case study. It is important to note that there is no attempt to generalise the findings from the single case study of Lighthouse School to other schools responding to the LAEP Framework or other schools undergoing restructuring in other systems. As Rosenmund (2000) indicates, case studies are closely connected with their specific contexts, and therefore the findings should not be directly transferred to other contexts. However, we take the position as argued by Ulichnecht (1993) that case studies can constitute heuristic devices or 'good tools for thinking with' and they can provide the reader with some insights into potential student responses to educational change elsewhere. There will, however, be important differences in other settings, which we would not want to gloss over. In fact, we would highlight the importance of understanding the different contexts in which students find themselves and the different ways they may, or may not, participate in educational change. Lighthouse School is located within an upper middle class area, and as part of the larger project from which this paper is drawn, case studies have been conducted in other districts, including schools in low socio-economic areas and
in rural areas. This triangulation has provided for interesting cross-case analysis to highlight both similarities and differences in different contexts which will be reported in subsequent papers.

The LAEP framework incorporates both the rhetoric of social justice and the discourses of economic rationalism in its aim to restructure educational provision in the State of Western Australia. Both discourses are evident in the policy documents, which explore restructuring in the interests of economic efficiencies concurrently with issues of adolescent alienation and students of educational risk. This study revealed that both discourses were also evident at the school level, as students and staff struggled with the conflicting messages of the policy as it was put into practice at Lighthouse School.

Economising discourses

The LAEP framework represents one particular example of ‘economising’ education (Gorga, 2000) as manifest in different forms in other Australian States and other countries. Devolution of decision making to local areas was to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of educational delivery. Although the policy featured themes of localised implementation, the processes were clearly top-down, with limited empowerment to the local level in relation to the policy goals. The whole process was orchestrated and monitored closely by the state in an attempt, par excellence, of “screwing at a distance”.

In the case of LAEP, parents would not only choose the school for their children to attend, but also, in theory, they would choose the structure of the school through processes of planning and consultation. However, in this case study, arguably, there was evidence of ‘engineered consent’ (Apple & Beane, 1999) for a decision made beforehand by a policy elite well removed from the local context. The “controlled consultation” was quite transparent to the disempowered school community of Lighthouse School. The three schools targeted for amalgamation and closure became responsible only for the sparsity and efficient implementation of the centrally established goals so that any “crises” in the implementation was “exported” from the central authorities to the local school (after the notion that devolution policies ‘export the crisis’ by Whitty et al., 1998).

Apple has argued that marketisation policies have shifted the emphasis from student needs to student performance and from “what the school does for the student to what the student does for the school” (Apple, 2001, p. 71). Similarly, Ball has claimed that when education is restructured as a consumption good in the market system “children and their performances are traded and exchanged as commodities” (Ball, 1994, p. 51). Lighthouse School was intended a “super school” in a sense, a lighthouse educational institution (Hargreaves et al., 1993) reaching “new and dizzy heights of eventualities” (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1992, p. 8) in competition with the wealthy established private schools market in the area.

In the new education market, impressions are important as are the skills that a school (McWilliam et al., 1999). Evidence from students in this case study suggests that Lighthouse School has been successful in portraying a ‘private school’ image and a view that it is economically wasteful to attend a private school when there is a new, “excellent” public sector alternative. For example, the buildings, the artwork, the types of students that they understand to be acceptable in the school, all appeared to conform to a private school image. The buildings were made with limewash, giving Lighthouse School at the same time a new and an ancient appearance. Image was foregrounded.

Markets have predictable effects on all schools, and Lighthouse School is no exception. Of relevance to this study, Apple and Beane (1999) note the role of markets in redefining the principal’s role as an agent ‘selling’ the school to an external audience, as observed by many students in this case study. Also, at this case study has shown, a market climate has also led to a restriction of the role of students who no longer attend simply to ‘get an education’, their role now includes projecting an academic image, for show. They are to add to the image of the school by performing well, to enhance the reputation of the school in public league tables and hence further the reputation of the school. Those perceived as not fitting the school’s new image may be encouraged to leave, and hence traditional forms of education are reinforced with the introduction of markets (Whitty et al., 1998).

Policy making is complex and messy and there are often contradictions and conflicts (Ball, 1994). As is evident in the policy framework of Valentine (2002) the interfaces between the rhetoric and means levels of the policy process are two-way. Whilst LAEP involved a top-down policy initiative, students did not always passively accept what was happening to them. Although they were powerless to have any real influence in the changes, they offered various forms of resistance during the process. Falloon (1991, p. 4) makes the point that “marketizing certain changes may be more progressive than adopting them?” In one instance, students were more active in their resistance, organizing a petition in the hope of returning one teacher who they identified as the “best” from their old school but who did not gain a position as a teacher in the new school. Students have very clear ideas about those teachers who best influence their learning (Rudduck, Chapman, & Wallace, 1996). This may have been a good time for senior personnel making the staffing decisions to listen to the voice of the students.

Competing social justice discourses

Concern with social justice issues such as students at educational risk forms a major part of the LAEP framework policy discourse. However, there are significant ideological tensions between the social justice discourses and the competing economic discourses underlying the LAEP policy. Henry and Taylor (1997) have noted that amongst policy makers there is a belief that the discourses of economic rationalism and social justice are complementary. The policy assumption has been that the introduction of economic rationalist policies, leading to economic efficiency, would also lead to more equitable outcomes for all students (Taylor, et al., 1997).

It is often stated by policy critics that introducing the ‘twins’ of devolution and marketisation policies will bring greater diversity in education. However, as Apple (2001) has pointed out, rather than leading to increased quality of education and greater diversity, these policies have not created a great many differences in the types and styles of education being offered, with most schools opting for a traditional model of education. Arguably, markets exacerbate vertical differentiation and hierarchy rather than promote horizontal diversity. At the case study school students believed that staff were more interested in those who showed academic ability and that those who did not fit this model were encouraged to take an alternative pathway of technical training in another institution. It was the students in the academic extension course who were willing to sign up for a large number of tertiary entrants subjects, who the students perceived as being all the resources, the best teachers, and the greatest encouragement. Rather than diversity, alternatives became denigrated, and the emphasis placed on the “academically talented” students reinforcing traditional conceptions of upper secondary schooling. Whilst the encouragement to move to technical education does not conflict with an economic discourse for educational outcomes, it did sometimes conflict with the students’ own desires as many had expectations of going to university. Students wanted to learn but some believed that the restructuring as a result of the LAEP process had made a detrimental impact on their education and future life prospects.

The LAEP framework and its implementation was framed in the interest of increasing the quality of student learning for all. Yet, as Neumann and his fellow researchers (Neumann & Associates, 1996) found in their study of school restructuring, educational institutions, whilst paying a great deal of attention to changes in school organization, often failed to make a difference to the quality of student learning (Neumann & Associates, 1996).

Empowerment of students in educational change

McNeil (2000) asserts that market ideologies in education have the effect of dehumanising students, deploying students as young human beings (p. 90), which is not in the interests of any students. As students become reconstrued as both customers and a commodity to be traded between schools, arguably they are disempowered as active democratic participants (Apple & Beane, 1999).

The approach to educational change at Lighthouse School reflect a form of “paternalistic” authoritarianism ... framed by an expectation that children should defer to their parents and teachers (Elliot, 2000, p. 183). However, the students in this study had strong views about the restructuring...
occurring around them. Miles (1998) in a moment of whipple wrote his vision for the year 2020, including an "increasing use of students as researchers on classroom practice (to play) a very strong part in both the reorganisation of teaching and for the diffusion of practices" (p. 83).

If educational change is to be successful in the promotion of learning for all students, then teachers must be allowed, and encouraged, to take an active part in the process, instead of being relegated to a powerless position as "objects" of change (Fullan, 1992). It may be time to recognize that students also have an active role in schools (Corbett & Wilson, 1995), rather than allowing them to remain as a silent majority, who are given no voice, mute, excluded from participating in the transformation of their own education (Crotty, 1998). The only valid way to move from silence to participation and liberation, according to Freire, is to engage in dialogue (Freire, 1970). Dialogue cannot be forced, but should be the result of committed involvement, otherwise it degenerates into pseudo dialogue, a face and little more than "paternalistic manipulation" (Crotty, 1998, p. 155). Freire believed that all education should be "pragmatic-vital dialogue from start to finish" (Crotty, 1998, p. 155), learners and educators working together as partners.

The LEAP Framework for educational restructuring in WA schools reflects "global" policy trends of devolution and marketisation, although there are important context-specific differences in the ways that such policies play out in particular located settings. Despite policy discourses of empowerment to local educational sites, students were largely absent in the ensuing processes of educational change. However, this research has demonstrated that, in their own ways, students were deeply impacted by the change process. Recognition of an active role for students in educational change may provide a means through which "recognising" and "globalising" discourses can be counterbalanced with discourses of social justice and empowerment for those at the local level—students, parents and teachers alike—in the interests of all participants in the processes of change.

Notes

1. Education is the legal responsibility of State governments in Australia. In the State of Western Australia (WA) government schools are under the jurisdiction of the Education Department of Western Australia (EDWA) which was known as the Education Department of Western Australia (EDWA) in the 1990s and the Ministry of Education in the 1980s.

References

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